Review of the Services to Children in Care of the Yukon Territorial Government's Department of Health and Social Services

The Child Welfare League of Canada

June, 2002

"The mark of a civilized society is the care it devotes to the well-being of its children."

(cited in Harriet Ward, Current Initiatives in the Development of Outcome-based Evaluation of Children's Services in England and Wales.

Child welfare organizations and practitioners are treated much like the children and families they serve. On one hand, they are often pilloried in the press and public forums when something goes amiss: a child under their care is abused or killed, or parents accuse workers of acting precipitously in apprehending their children. On the other hand, they are chronically neglected most of the time. The daily work of child welfare takes place without notice but often under trying conditions with limited resources.

(Callahan,M. 1993)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A:	BACKGROUND	1
B:	THE REVIEWERS - THE CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF CANADA	3
	❑ Our Approach to the Task	3
	❑ Conceptual Framework of the Review Team	4
	❑ Review Process	7
C:	THE BROAD CHILD WELFARE CONTEXT	9
	❑ A Yukon Overview	11
D:	THE FIRST NATIONS CONTEXT	13
E:	FINDINGS	16
	1.0 Workload	16
	❑ General Child Welfare Workload Context	16
	❑ Family and Children's Services	19
	❑ Administrative Support	23
	❑ Child Welfare Policy Support	24
	2.0 Service and Program Supports	26
	3.0 Infra-structural Supports	40
	4.0 Quality Assurance	46
APPENDIX A:	SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	51
APPENDIX B:	BIBLIOGRAPHY	57

A: BACKGROUND:

The following report is intended to provide the reader with an outline of common themes endemic to child welfare services in Canada into which the content of the Yukon review can be better understood. There is, therefore, commentary throughout the report that identifies child welfare issues common to most jurisdictions into which the observations of the Yukon circumstances are situated.

The Department of Health and Social Services of the Government of the Yukon Territory delivers child welfare services through two managerial lines. The services within Whitehorse are managed by the Family and Children's Services Branch, and the services in the regions outside of Whitehorse are managed through Regional Services. There is a close working relationship between the two managerial lines and an interconnection at the service level as cases flow between the two lines depending on service needs and resource availability. The Director of the Family and Children's Services Branch who acts as the Director of Family and Children's Services under the Children's Act (1986) and the Manager of Regional Services, together administer the Yukon child welfare mandate. Both report to the Assistant Deputy Minister of Social Services. Both the Branch and Regional Services deliver a number of family and children's programs in addition to the child welfare mandate. For the purposes of this paper the Branch and Regional Services will be collectively referred to as "the Department" unless otherwise specified.

In the year 2001, the Social Services Division of the Department of Health and Social Services embarked on a comprehensive review of services to children in care under the Children's Act (1986) including the processes which follow from the decision to admit children to care, the processes that accrue to the planning and delivery of services to the children while in care and at discharge, and the systems which monitor the quality of that care.

The objectives of the review were stated as follows:

- Review the adequacy of the case management process for children in care;
- Assess the quality of care for all children in care in the Yukon;
- Establish an independent quality assurance process that will audit services for children in care in the future.

B: THE REVIEWERS - THE CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF CANADA (CWLC):

The CWLC is a national, federally incorporated charitable organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the well-being of Canada's children. It provides leadership and support to its members, and works to actively promote collaborative partnerships with other organizations interested in improving the life chances for children. The CWLC is fully committed to promoting standards of excellence for child and family service programs, and to provide consultation, training and technical assistance to support the implementation of effective practices and programs. A specific area of focus for the CWLC is the development of high quality services and good outcomes for children in public care. One of the several services and programs it offers is training and consultation to children's services providers with the goal of developing program excellence for children and youth through its National Consultation Centre.

The CWLC National Consultation Centre provides program review, evaluation, and development services to child and youth serving organizations. It has provided services across the country in a variety of language and cultural environments, and respects the language, beliefs, history and traditions of the communities with which it works.

Our Approach to the Task: The CWLC and its Centre are committed to a participatory approach and seek to facilitate an environment where the voices of all stakeholders are respected and heard, especially the children, youth and families and their communities for whom the services are designed, and the direct service and supervisory staff and their service partners who work on the front-line.

The participatory process brings to bear the collective wisdom, experience, and commitment of both the professional and lay communities to create a more

enriched and informed process through which reconstructive social and personal action can be facilitated.

Conceptual Framework of the Review Team: The Team brings a perspective, which supports the importance of the family and community in the care of their children and youth who are unable to reside with their families. This includes a deep respect for the culture and traditions that form the basis for the child's sense of self, and his or her identification with a primary social and cultural community. In relation to children's mental health services but equally relevant to child welfare, the National Institute of Mental Health argues, that "the importance of attending to and engaging families in every aspect of . . . services has become the sine qua non of treatment and care plans. Not only does such engagement represent the only defensible moral platform from which to consider the needs of families and children, it also represents recognition of the fact that solutions to child and adolescent mental illness require the partnership of professionals, families, scientists and youth themselves."

The Team makes the assumption that, for the most effective and enduring learning and rehabilitative experiences to occur, services to children, youth, and their families and alternate care-givers are best delivered through a network constructed of partnerships amongst the key stakeholders in the life of the child. The collective wisdom, experience, and commitment of both the professional and lay communities can, thus, create a powerful intervention through which constructive change for children and youth can be facilitated. As Homer-Dixon observes, ". . .we can develop procedures for cooperative decision-making to make sure that people's experiential knowledge - the wisdom that comes from years of working with a complex system. . . - is available and used when it is needed most."

Typically, a multi-disciplinary approach provided as close to home and community as possible offers the best opportunity to support a child's well-being,

with specialized services being strategically utilized as part of a broad, integrated service planning, care management, and teaching process. The establishment of clear, achievable goals, including the active participation of the child, family, and significant community members in setting and monitoring the goals, dramatically increases the likelihood of successful goal attainment and the improvement of the life chances for the children.

Much can be learned from the literature on mental health and community collaboration to inform child welfare practice. Silvestri and Hallwright (2001) state that a recovery approach requires organizational development which includes learning to work in partnership, recognizing the role of the natural community of family, friends, and neighbours in the recovery process, moving to an integrated service approach driven by consumer outcomes, and moving from "silo" funding to flexible use of resources to create individually tailored plans. Consistent with this injunction to develop recovery-oriented services, the practice literature increasingly talks about integrated and collaborative approaches to mental health services as showing promising results in achieving desirable outcomes. It is important, therefore, to deepen our understanding of such approaches in order to determine the extent to which their application has relevance to a recovery-oriented child welfare service that is embedded in its communities.

The literature on 'learning organizations or systems,' provides a helpful perspective from which to consider collaborative approaches that form a foundation for recovery-oriented child welfare services within the objectives of the review. The conceptual framework of 'learning systems' promotes a shift from considering child welfare services as a distinct sector of mandated services to considering child welfare as a dynamic interrelated and interdependent system of services and resources which cross sectoral lines, and which reflect a synergistic variety of philosophies, cultures, service modalities, and perspectives.

Again, borrowing from applicable mental health literature, a 1997 Health Canada

Discussion Paper argues that ". . .integrated systems provide greater continuity, comprehensiveness and flexibility. Service gaps and service duplications are more readily identified and addressed. This reduces unnecessary burdens on consumers and their families, reduces risks of poor clinical decisions due to lack of adequate communication, reduces negative interactions among providers and increases coordination of interventions."

A recent review of best practices literature undertaken by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services in relation to services for children and youth found that "effective, intensive community-based child and family services has the following characteristics of integrated practice:

- They are situated within a broad continuum of community services and part of the shared vision of services within the community;

- They are multifaceted to address the multiple determinants of behaviour and include counselling, skill training, and assisting the family in accessing needed services, resources and supports, including services within the community to ensure that basic needs are being met;

- They have an identified leader to undertake the process of community development: e.g. developing partnerships with both informal and formal community services and assessing their usefulness in meeting the needs of the child and family.

The CWLC Review Team also takes the position that to assess the quality of child welfare services, one must look at the environment in which the services are delivered and examine what can reasonably be achieved within the resources, tools, and supports that are available. This, in turn, must be compared with what resources are actually required to meet the demands and expectations placed upon the child welfare system.

The Review Process: Within the *context stated above, the process of the* review was intentionally inclusive. The focus of the observations of this report is on the services and resources that form the Department's response to the children and youth in its care.

In keeping with the principle of accessibility, the reviewers conversed with a broad range of informants including Department staff, foster families, staff of collateral agencies and services, representatives from the mental health, health, education and police sectors, Legal Services, the Family Court judges and Justice of the Peace, children, youth and their families who are or were service recipients, representatives of Yukon First Nations, and community members with an interest in the children and youth of the Yukon. The reviewers travelled to five communities outside of Whitehorse that were accessible within the time and resources available to speak with stakeholders on site. These communities included Haines Junction, Carcross, Carmacks, Pelly Crossing, and Teslin.

Legislation, policies, practice standards, manuals, procedures and protocols of the Department and previous reports that pertained to child welfare in the Yukon were reviewed. Files of children in care and foster families were examined to determine compliance with generally accepted practice standards and Department requirements.

The scope of the review was limited to responding to the question of whether the children in the care of the Department are well-served. How they got to be in care was beyond scope though an important issue. As such, the review did not consider the broader child protection system, the range of prevention and early intervention services that are, or could be, available to prevent the circumstances requiring admission, nor the programs, processes or issues related to the services to children at risk of requiring child protective services, nor those found to be in need of protection but not requiring admission to care. References to many of the valuable programs and services in the Yukon such as the Yukon

Family Services Association, the Help and Hope for Families Society, Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon, and the Yukon Women's Transition Home Society to name but a few are limited, as are references to the excellent Department-operated programs such as the Youth Achievement Centre, Healthy Families, Youth Sex Offender Treatment Services, and Child Abuse Treatment Services.

It is important to note, however, that a successful in-care service is dependent on a strong child protective service. The events, processes and decisions leading to a child's admission, the resources and services that have been engaged, and the nature of the participation of the child's family and community are all predictors of the child's adjustment and future well-being in care.

C: THE BROAD CHILD WELFARE CONTEXT:

Before looking at the specifics of the Yukon experience, it is helpful to understand the broader context of child welfare in Canada to provide a context within which to assess the Yukon services.

In the simplest of terms, the tasks of child welfare's in-care services are described in the Child Welfare League of America's foster training manuals as:

- Protecting and nurturing children;
- Meeting children's developmental needs and addressing their developmental delays;
- Supporting relationships between children and their families;
- Connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime;
- Working as a member of a professional team.

However, as Marylyn Callahan (1993) writes, ". . .child welfare work is fraught with profound strains. The contradictions are clear: save the child from harm but keep families together; police family performance yet support family strengths; satisfy personal and professional obligations for good practice yet deliver service within the mandate of the employing organization; work collaboratively yet bear the responsibility of that work individually."

To further add to the stress of child welfare work is the challenge of working in high risk situations where, "child welfare workers are often confronted by traumatic events, such as threats, personal injury or the injury or death of a child for whom the worker has responsibility." (Callahan, 1993). Regehr (2000) reports that approximately half the child welfare workers that she surveyed in her study indicated that they had been subject to threats of violence, and almost one-quarter had been assaulted at some time.

The problem is felt in the Yukon and in jurisdictions across North America. "On all fronts, child welfare agencies. . .are experiencing extraordinarily high turnover rates, low employee morale, and stifling competition from other human service sectors. In essence, we've given an impossible mandate to child welfare professionals: work longer hours with heavier workloads under increasingly stressful, and at times threatening conditions. . ." (Alwon,2000)

Child welfare services are typically under-resourced for the tasks that are expected of them. Such is the case in the Yukon. There is a level of responsibility and expectation on child welfare workers that exceeds the authority and resources that they have, notwithstanding the general public's mistaken perception of their considerable power. As such, child welfare is typified by expectations exceeding the capacity to do.

Paradoxically, the opportunity to secure both the tools and resources necessary to successfully meet expectations is limited by general public disinterest in child welfare services except in response to reported incidents of where the system appears to have failed. The energy of the response, however, typically generates little meaningful in the way of increased resources, or general public understanding of child welfare issues. "The focus of news stories on sensational details of specific cases serves to bring the attention of the public to individual experience and away from the social context of those experiences." (Swift, 2001)

> One should never, apparently, talk to anyone at a party for more than two minutes. When time is up, you simply say, "I think we're expected to circulate. Nice to meet you," and go off. If you get lost for words after asking someone what they do to which they reply "Undertaker" or "I work for the Child (Welfare) Agency," you must simply ask, "Do you enjoy that?"
>
> (Helen Fielding, Bridget Jones's Diary)

The work is high risk in nature, and the consequences of error can be severe. In smaller communities such as one finds in the Yukon, child welfare workers tend to be known by the whole community, which can contribute to a sense of

exposure and vulnerability for them and their families. The extraordinary demands that are made on the child welfare services has lead to a discouraged workforce, uneven practice, and a cynical public. This, too, is evident in the Yukon.

The child welfare system is vulnerable to criticism as it suffers from the imperfections that come from working with limited resources in a complex area, where the goodwill and active participation and support of the public is necessary but generally unavailable. The work is further impacted by the difficulties associated with working with involuntary clients and the "awesome responsibility" of protecting society's most vulnerable citizens based on incomplete information and an inexact science. (Regehr, 2000). Notwithstanding Anatol Rapaport's observation that, "The moral development of a civilization is measured by the breadth of its sense of community," the needs of children at risk and their families tend to teeter at the edge of the community construct, and its members need reminding of the importance of contributing to the well-being of their most vulnerable citizens.

Nevertheless, ". . . child welfare work remains the crucible of social work practice. The work is fundamental and significantly affects the lives of the most vulnerable members of society: poor children, women, families from different cultures, the chronically ill, the abused and homeless." (Callahan, 1993)

A Yukon Overview: Notwithstanding the above, the reviewers found a talented and diverse child welfare workforce in the Yukon, with considerable concern and commitment to children at risk and their families. There is also a dedicated management group informed about the cause of caring for children.

There are generally workable legislation, well-developed standards, policies and procedures, a recently released comprehensive Child Welfare Manual which articulates appropriate values and principles, and statements of rights of children

and families that are important in grounding practice. There are also statements and protocols guiding relationships with the First Nations, several well-constructed protocols with collateral service agents, and a complaints process for service recipients. The above are indicators of a sound infra-structure upon which to build good practice.

From the standpoint of services, there is a well-developed understanding of the need for a range of inter-related programs. There is an impressive array of complementary services and resources, particularly in Whitehorse. Service partnerships can provide a multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary range of supports and services for children in care, their caregivers, and their families. In the regions, the staff who carry the child welfare mandate as well as several other complementary human service responsibilities speak of their flexible use of multi-dimensional approaches which strengthen their ability to support children and their families, and enhance community capacity.

Child Abuse Treatment Services, Healthy Families, and the Youth Achievement Centre are concrete products of the Department's commitment to developing imaginative programs that enrich the services for children, youth and their families. Also the development of a multi-faceted child welfare service through in-home supports such as family and foster family support workers shows thoughtful development of the service spectrum. Such direction is supported by the finding of Cameron and Vanderwoerd that, ". . .there does not appear to be any single, focused program that will prevent child abuse and neglect and the need for child placements in families coping with multiple problems. Rather, support programs that are capable of sustaining families and protecting children through situations of high stress are characterised by the provision of multiple kinds of support and by a high level of contact with program participants." (website Child and Family Canada: http://www.cfc-efc.ca/docs/00000857.html)

D: THE FIRST NATIONS CONTEXT:

The largest number of children in care of the Department are from First Nations. The participation of the First Nations in the planning and care of their children is essential, therefore, if the interests and well-being of their children are to be attended to.

Children served in care 2001/02 Source: Dept. Annual Budget Submission	**First Nations**	**Other**	**Total**
Number	191	124	315
Percentage	60.6%	39.4%	100%

There is a stated willingness to work together as partners on the part of both the First Nations and the Department. It is now a matter of finding ways to ensure meaningful and full participation of the First Nations that are consistent with the legislation, the best interests of the children as required by the legislation, and satisfies the interests of the First Nations communities in the care of their children.

The leadership of the First Nations communities with whom the Review Team met had thoughtfully considered objectives in caring for their children, and recognized the opportunities that exist in a partnership with the Department. They are seeking a system that learns from past experiences and moves forward to create positive change.

First Nations spokespeople identified the need to understand that many of the leaders themselves have come from an abusive and exploitive history and are influenced by its impact. They see the need for a level of reconciliation so that

First Nation members can move from that history and personal experience to increase their capacity to care for their children. Part of this reconciliation process requires an understanding at the Department that allows for the discussion that comes from reflecting on history. Listening to the First Nations expression of their early experiences is necessary in order to move forward. It is an important first step in being able to establish a mutually satisfying and respectful service partnership.

The time must be taken at the front end of the process of developing a relationship of trust and respect to achieve reconciliation, and the capacity and willingness to move forward. It is a matter of the representatives of the Department understanding the profound reality of that First Nations history and how it translates into personal experiences which impact First Nations communities and their children. In that way the two worldviews can come together as respectful equals to address their shared interest in children.

I am roaming,
Roaming,
Restless,
Aimless.
In the snow I see
My ancestors'
Bloody footprints,
Moccasin prints.
My old boots are worn
And down at the heels.
On what road am I
The white man's road,
Or the Indians'?
There are no signposts.
The road is uphill,
And the wind is in my face
Still I go on.

(Yellow Bird, cited in Mary Crow Dog, "Lakota Woman")

It is important to maintain relationships that will support broad-based cross-sectoral collaboration which provide early identification of children at risk and respond before the conditions are such that a child needs to be admitted to care.

Finding the respectful and satisfying balance between the mandatory legislative requirements of the Department, and its accrued expertise, and the fundamental rights and responsibility of the First Nations for the care of their children forms the parameters within which each must enter the circle of care.

It would be presumptuous for the reviewers to postulate a mechanism for finding the sense of balance that will lead to a resolution for all parties concerned. Developing and maintaining a respectful partnership that can meaningfully reconcile the legislative mandate of the Department with the rights, responsibilities and capacities of the First Nations is complex.

A promising approach that is under consideration is the Child Welfare Secretariat of the Council of Yukon First Nations which includes the Department and welcomes full participation of First Nations who are not Council members. Such a structure could serve as a meeting place from which could emerge a strategic process for developing an inclusive collaborative partnership that is respectful of the roles, responsibilities, rights and investment of each of the parties.

The Child Welfare Secretariat could be tasked with looking at flexible models of child welfare, collaborating on strategies to increase First Nations resources and community capacities, and monitoring and proposing changes in legislation, policies and practices that are deemed to be important to strengthen First Nations child welfare services.

The necessary condition for establishing an effective, appropriate and responsive child welfare service to respond to the needs of First Nations children and their families will be ensuring a respectful, open and inclusive dialogue between the Department and all First Nations of the Yukon.

E: FINDINGS:

The issues that emerged in the course of the review are ordered as follows:

Firstly, there is a discussion of WORKLOAD. The volume of work expected of the child welfare staff and managers considerably exceeds generally accepted standards. The workload issue stresses the entire system and must be addressed if meaningful reform is to be expected.

Secondly, SERVICE AND PROGRAM SUPPORTS will be discussed. Service and program supports include the range of internal and external services and resources available to encourage good practice decisions, case management and planning tools, and connections to community service partners.

Thirdly, the INFRASTRUCTURAL SUPPORTS that are necessary to buttress the child welfare direct services will be addressed. These include such elements as legislation, policies and procedures, training and development, the organizational structure and information systems.

Finally, a QUALITY ASSURANCE approach will be presented.

1.0 WORKLOAD

General Child Welfare Workload Context: There are some conditions endemic to child welfare regardless of the jurisdiction. The discussion presents a framework within which the Yukon staff, managers and foster families, and their service partners, are operating which is similar to their national colleagues.

A discussion of workload goes well beyond the simple aspect of the number of cases carried. As Bradley and Sutherland found in a study of child welfare workloads, "Elements of workload include unlimited and unwieldy caseloads,

court appearances, overwhelming documentation requirements, poor working conditions and low salary." The work of child welfare has become increasingly bureaucratized as child welfare service providers attempt to balance the importance of face-to-face client contact with the need to strengthen the precision of the assessment of risk and delivery of the appropriate service in an increasingly litigious environment. However, the caseload size, when measured against generally accepted standards, provides a good indicator of the degree to which child welfare workers are working in reasonable or unreasonable conditions.

In the Yukon, and across North America, jurisdictions are experiencing large caseload increases. It has been estimated that the number of children in care in Canada has increased by 50 to 65 percent between 1996 and 2000. The Yukon, too, is experiencing the surge in service demand. The causes of the increase are unclear in the literature. Suggestions are that the increase could represent a changing incidence rate, different reporting patterns, or changes in practice, perhaps in response to inquests related to deaths of children under the supervision of child welfare authorities. One contributing factor is generally considered to be the increased recognition that children who witness violence are children at risk and are increasingly being referred to child welfare authorities.

The caseload pressure has led several jurisdictions in Canada to focus on children most in need and diverting children at lesser risk to alternative resources. As a result, workloads are more challenging and complex. In her study of child welfare workloads Swift (2001) found that ". . .cases calling for preventive work were seldom opened at all."

Elevated risk within the overall caseload contributes to stress felt by the direct service workers and their managers. "As a result of working with high risk situations, child welfare workers are often confronted by traumatic events, such

as threats, personal injury or the injury or death of a child for whom the worker has responsibility.' (Regehr, 2000).

It is within an understanding of the complex and stressful nature of child welfare that the workloads in the Yukon were reviewed.

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has developed recommended caseloads standards that apply equally in Canada. The CWLA caseload benchmarks contained in their publication, "CWLA Standards for Child Welfare Practice, " represent what is accepted as the best current thinking and practice in child welfare. The benchmarks are as follows:

Function	Caseload Benchmark
CHILD PROTECTION	
Intake and Investigation	12 cases per worker
Family Services	15 cases per worker
SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN CARE	
Children in Care	12-13 children in care cases
Youth in Independent Living	15-20 Youth in care
Adoption Services	30 prospective adoptive families, or, 20 children in care under 5 years old, or 10 –12 children in care over 5 years old
Supervisors	1:5 workers
Family Support Workers	6-8 Families

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES:

Intake/Assessment and Family Services: Intake/Assessment and Family Services teams are the front door to child welfare services for children at risk and their families. These teams respond to referrals, do the initial assessments of risk, and provide services to support children and families. Where necessary, they admit children into care temporarily or permanently according to the assessed needs of the child.

While Intake/Assessment and Family Services falls outside of the scope of the review, two issues require these services to be considered:

- approximately 20% of cases within Intake/Assessment and Family Services unit are children in care;
- the consequences of understaffing the frontline implicate the numbers of children coming into care, the kinds of child protection issues that might otherwise be dealt with while the child remains at home, and the quality of the admission process which impacts the child's adjustment to care.

Although there is some variance in the data that was provided, the current Branch Child Protection caseloads compare to standards as follows:

	Benchmark	Current Caseload
Intake and Assessment	12 cases	25 - 30
Child Protection and Family Services	15 cases	25 - 36

It was noted that there was a willingness to flexibly and creatively use resources that served families well and prevented or delayed the admission of children into care, or expedited repatriation home. However, the Whitehorse frontline child protection workers are handicapped in working to their potential by their high

caseloads which limit their capacity to perform, and which contribute to the discouragement and stress reported to the reviewers.

It will be important for the Department to reconcile the discrepancy between the benchmarks as reasonable standards for caseloads, and the current caseloads. Under-resourcing child protective services directly impacts services to children in care. As over-worked frontline staff do not have the time to undertake their investigative, assessment of risk, and support activities fully, they tend to defer to decisions which are most likely to protect the children from harm in the short term, that is, admission to care in the absence of having the time to build supports for children and families at risk into their homes and communities. It also means that the activities which support effective use of in-care services such as planned admissions, working with the child and family to prepare for admission, follow-up counselling, the development of inclusive plans of care, and having a concise long term plan, are less likely to be in place.

In the review of cases in the Yukon, there was some evidence of situations where children came into care who might have been successfully served at home had the time and resources been available. Notwithstanding a strong commitment to supporting families and concerted efforts to find flexible in-home solutions by the Intake and Family Services Team in the Yukon, their efforts are constrained by the limits in time and resources.

Child Placement Services: Child Placement Services provide counselling and support to children who have been admitted into care, and plan for their future.

There is a particular burden of responsibility on the "state" in relation to the children in its care. The state must act in the role of good parent, and attend to the child's right to protection, nurturance, and having their developmental needs met. The child welfare workers act on behalf of the state to ensure that the

children in their charge are provided reasonable supports to increase their life chances. This responsibility involves such tasks as work with foster families and social workers, birth and adoptive families, extended families, kinship networks, schools, health services, social networks, and service partners.

Child Placement Services, too, has workloads in excess of recommended standards. With caseloads in excessive of the benchmarks, staff are concerned about their capacity to adequately meet the needs of the children in care.

As well, if case files are to guide direct practice, and serve as a useful record of services to the child and family, there must be the capacity to keep case files current. This requires addressing workload issues so that workers have the time to maintain accurate records without drawing inordinate amounts of time away from direct service, and supervisors have the opportunity to meaningfully review the files with staff as a case management tool.

	Benchmark	**Current Undifferentiated Caseload**
Children In Care Caseloads	12 – 13 children/youth, or 15 – 20 youth in Independent Living	+/-25 cases
Adoption	30 prospective families, or 20 children under 5 years old, or 10-12 children over 5 years old	+/-28 cases

Support Services to Foster Families: The CWLC/CWLA Standards do not specify benchmarks for foster family support workers. Given that the foster family network is the crux of any child welfare system, with almost 70% of all children in care in the Yukon placed in foster homes, the importance of maintaining, supporting and developing the foster family system is self-evident.

The Foster Family Support unit is responsible for two important functions. The first is the recruitment, selection, training and development of foster families. The second is the ongoing support to foster families to help them address both the needs of the children in their care, and the impact of fostering on their own family.

The CWLC Review Team recommends a preferred benchmark of no more than 20 foster families for each foster family support worker, and separate dedicated foster intake, and foster family training and development positions. The current configuration has one supervisor and one foster intake person sharing recruitment, selection and training functions and 2.25 foster family support workers supporting approximately 107 foster families.

	Benchmark	**Current Caseload**
Foster Family Support	15-20 foster families	38-47 foster families

Regional Workers: The Regional workers have a generalist function which includes, among others, responsibility for social assistance, young offenders and child welfare, managing a small office, and supervising administrative support staff, family support workers, supported independent living workers, and home support workers. Their child welfare responsibilities span child protection intake and assessment, family services, services to children in care, and the recruitment and support of foster families.

There is a substantive and immediate need to increase the supervisory resources. There is one supervisor responsible for ten full-time equivalent regional workers. CWLC/CWLA Standards recommend one supervisor for five staff. The 1:5 ratio is particularly important given the breadth of work in the

regions. Regional workers have responsibility for several portfolios in addition to child welfare. The capacity of the supervisor of Regional child welfare services was severely restricted by the logistics of the number of supervisees, distance and travel time, and the varying conditions amongst the communities served. As the supervisor has little capacity to participate sufficiently with the individual worker in their communities, his ability to assist the staff with community-based child welfare strategies is limited.

The child welfare mandate needs to be paramount within the responsibilities of the Regional workers. As such there must be adequate opportunity for support, mentoring, consultation and review, especially in the remote areas where some communities are reportedly experiencing serious social dysfunction.

Administrative Support Staff: Although it has been argued that the advent of computers on the desks of workers would lessen the need for administrative support staff, in practice, given the demanding workloads and increased legislative requirement of child welfare work, administrative support continues to be an important link in the network of resources and support.

While there is no articulated standard for a ratio of Administrative Support staff to professional staff, a useful guideline commonly used is one administrative support person for each standard work unit of one manager and five or six professional staff. If one were to apply that guideline to the Branch, one can see why there is considerable stress felt by administrative staff, managers and professional staff. In the Branch direct service lines of Family Services and Placement Services, there are two administrative support staff for approximately 2 managers, 5 supervisors, 19 child welfare workers, plus the teen counsellor, family support staff, and contract workers who are brought in periodically for specific tasks. The lack of sufficient administrative support considerably impacts the workload of the direct service workers and their managers.

In order to facilitate the link between the Regional workers and the Branch, it would also be useful to have an administrative support staff situated in Whitehorse dedicated to Regional workers with a child welfare mandate.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Given the serious consequences of understaffing at the frontline, it is recommended that Department review the current level of supervisor and social worker positions compared to the CWLC/CWLA benchmarks, and address staffing shortfalls.

Child Welfare Policy Support: Child welfare policy development may appear tangential to direct services to children in care but impacts services by diverting direct service staff from front-line duties. There are several important processes to meaningful policy work. One is the gathering of the experiences which inform the policy in the first place; a second is the framing, writing, and processing for approval; a third is the subsequent training needed for effective implementation, and a fourth is policy review to ensure currency. Regardless of the size of a child welfare jurisdiction, policy development and review is a core function that needs dedicated support.

As the Branch has no policy unit, all such work currently draws on existing staff, from the Director through to the front-line. In a work environment with already heavy workloads, reliance on the existing workforce requires compromise and can either put at risk the integrity of the policy function, or divert resources away from direct service.

RECOMMENDATION 2: It is recommended that an additional staff be hired to assume responsibility for child welfare policy development, support for implementation, and review.

Summary: Addressing the staffing shortfalls identified above are a first step to any effort to ensure quality child welfare services in the Yukon.

Notwithstanding the best intentions of the well-meaning and capable staff and management that form the Yukon child welfare services, heavy workloads that result from under-resourcing undermines their ability to use their knowledge and skill to best effect on behalf of children. The resulting stress contributes to worker exhaustion, diminishes the capacity for thoughtful planning, limits the time spent building important service partnerships, and creates frustration, high staff turnover and difficulties in recruitment. It also increases the vulnerability of the Territory to liability.

When expectations exceed the capacity to do, whether that capacity is inhibited by under-resourcing, understaffing, or insufficient training and support, cracks begin to show in the service, no matter how skilled, able and willing the workforce is. The case file review exposed weaknesses in the Yukon child welfare services that can reasonably be attributed to the overload of both staff and managers that comes from excessive work demands with insufficient resources.

Good practice needs the resources and tools to accomplish good outcomes for children. Resources such as time, reasonable workloads which factor in the time it takes to plan and document, training and administrative support, and tools such as computers with good case management software greatly increase the likelihood of good practice.

2.0 SERVICE AND PROGRAM SUPPORTS

Case Review Process: The Placement Review Committee that is in place is an excellent construct. It can serve as a safeguard in ensuring the concepts of permanency and continuity of relationships are at the forefront when considering children's placement into care, replacement within care, and discharge from care. It also can serve as a vehicle to divert in-care resources to support children in their homes and communities.

Two characteristics of child welfare services across the country, including, as noted earlier, the Yukon are, a) when workers are overloaded, they tend to defer to admitting children at risk into care in the absence of having the resources to support the children in their homes and communities even though, if those supports were available, the children could be safely and successfully maintained at home, and b) although in-care services are expensive and evidence of the success of their outcomes is limited, funding mechanisms tend to encourage the placement of children since overages in expenditures for in-care services tend to be tolerated to a greater extent by funders than overages in family support services.

If each child who was to be admitted into care were reviewed from the perspective that diverting all or part of the child's prospective cost in care to family support services were possible, there is the strong likelihood that some children will be successfully maintained at home and effective family support services will be expanded.

RECOMMENDATION 3: It is recommended that:

- **the functioning and mandate of the Placement Review Team be reviewed by the staff and supervisors to ensure it best supports their needs in relation to the children being admitted to care;**

- **a decision-making framework be developed which provides for each potential admission to care being scrutinized in terms of possible alternative uses of the in-care funding that the child's potential placement would consume, with a view to using savings from in-care funding to support the child in her or his home or community if that is a viable and preferred option.**

Administrative Processes: Several staff raised concern that administrative processes related to such functions as placement requests, data-gathering, and case recording are duplicative and unnecessarily time-consuming. Although the reviewers did not undertake a comprehensive review of the administrative processes, it was evident that there may be areas in which the forms and processes can be streamlined. The key issue, however, is that the workers who use the forms and processes as supports to their work identify trouble spots and recommend solutions.

There is a need to keep in perspective those administrative functions that are required for good case practice on behalf of the child and family, and those that serve the interests of the organization. In the last twenty years, child welfare has become increasingly bureaucratized. Some of that increased bureaucratization has come as a result of an important recognition of the need for quality control, sound planning and service development, and effective communication to stakeholders. It has also been driven by an increasing organizational self-interest in the face of increased risk of liability.

As Swift (2001) comments, it is important not to reduce the caring functions of the social worker to ". . .a series of administrative functions, monitored through forms, protocols, checklists and accountability measures created outside the profession but entering into and reorganizing activities of professional labour." It is necessary however to construct administrative mechanisms that are respectful of both the direct service imperative and the organizational interests.

RECOMMENDATION 4: It is recommended that the forms and administrative and legislatively driven procedures and documentation be rationalized and simplified through a process involving frontline staff.

Use of Psychological Assessments: It was noted that the Department relies heavily on psychological assessments in case planning. Files showed frequent use of specialized assessments, the average in a selection of files reviewed being four per child during the average of five years in care. In the case planning found in the files reviewed, it appeared that deference was given to psychological reports over social assessments constructed by social work staff rather than as complementary to them.

There is no question that good assessments provided by collaterals within their area of expertise that are requested because of a need for information particular to their expertise is important and supportive of building comprehensive multi-disciplinary plans. However, assessments are also intrusive, can be unnecessarily repetitive, and can create unnecessary stress for the child or young person being assessed. It is important, then, for there to be a process to thoughtfully consider any request for assessments to ensure that it is the best use of resources, answers clear and specific questions, and is directly helpful to the planning for the child.

It is important for the Department, the courts, service partners and stakeholders to balance the competence of the social workers, family support and foster support workers, and child and youth staff to form comprehensive social assessments because of their continuous relationship with the child in his or her social context with the usefulness of supplementary assessments. It is a matter of contextualizing the viewpoints and seeing their complementarity.

RECOMMENDATION 5: It is recommended that:

- **particular attention be given to strengthening the ability of the social work staff to develop comprehensive social assessments in conjunction with their service partners;**
- **workers and supervisors scrutinize their use of psychological assessments to ensure that they provide a value-added to the development and delivery of a substantive Plan of Care.**

Foster Care: The data provided show the children in care were living in a range of resources, as can be seen in the table below.

Type of Placement on 01/09/01	% of children in care
Foster Home	69.5%
Independent Living	2.8%
Group Home	19.8%
Other	6.2%
Institution	1.7%

The table shows the key role of foster families in the Yukon. It will be important, then, to address the need for a comprehensive foster family development strategy to ensure that the number of foster homes needed is recruited, selected, trained, developed and retained. As well, the CWLC Review Team found opportunities for placing children who are currently in group care into family-based care.

Foster Family Development: Currently, the foster family recruitment, selection and development capacity of the Department is under-developed. It is commendable that the Department is considering "Looking After Children, (CANLAC)" and "Professional Resources for Information, Development and Education, (P.R.I.D.E.)" which are two substantive developments in caring for children that are linked nationally. As CANLAC addresses service planning and management, and P.R.I.D.E. addresses foster family recruitment, selection, training and development, they serve as complementary functions that will enrich the services to the children of the Yukon.

It will be important to ensure that the two approaches are introduced strategically, and with the full engagement of the staff and foster families so that they are seen to be a service support rather than an added overlay. Both approaches have the capacity to strengthen direct service, knowledge of outcomes, and quality assurance. While they are time consuming at the front end both pay off substantially in the long term. An added bonus is the link to the National Longitudinal Study for Children and Youth that will allow the Yukon to assess the outcomes for its children in care with the children across the country. The implementation of CANLAC and P.R.I.D.E. will require dedicated resources. An assessment of the resource needs will be an important step for the Department.

Centralization of Foster Care: It will be important to centralize the management and resourcing responsibility for all Yukon foster care resources within the Department, but ensure a relationship which respects the important role the staff in the regions play in recruiting and supporting the foster families in their areas. It will be difficult to construct a cohesive foster family recruitment, selection, and development program which ensures quality control and equitable access to resources without it being centralized in the Department.

Outreach to Foster families: It would be useful for the Department to test the level of congruence between the statements of "Philosophy and Objectives of

Foster Care," and "Rights and Responsibilities of Foster Parents" and the practical experience felt by the fostering families. Foster families that met with the Review Team all spoke of the level of detachment they feel from the Department, and a lack of recognition and understanding of their contribution. It will be important for the Department, as part of a general strategy to strengthen its foster care services, to undertake a Foster Parent Survey in conjunction with the Foster Families Association to gather the input of the foster families in a structured way that can form the basis of reconstructive action.

Foster Family Association: Because foster families are the primary resource for the children coming into care, there needs to be a vital partnership between the Department and its communities to ensure there is a full supply of active foster families. Recruitment, selection, training and development are key components that the Department, with responsibility for the Yukon foster services system, has embraced actively. A strong Foster Family Association can be a very useful partner to the Department in the recruitment, training development and retention of foster families.

The current Yukon Foster Family Association is fledgling in nature, and struggling to continue. It needs the active support and encouragement of the Department to thrive.

The Foster Service Spectrum: The foster care options in the Yukon are currently limited. Specialized family-based care tends to be delivered through purchase of service options. The reviewers met both talented and capable foster families and support workers who would be able to provide a broader range of foster care services to include some children currently residing in group care.

The Department is encouraged to develop a resource development strategy to increase the range of services provided by foster families, including increased

development of respite foster families, emergency placement foster families to reduce the reliance on the receiving home, and therapeutic foster families.

RECOMMENDATION 6: It is recommended that the Department, in collaboration with the Foster Families Association, ensure:

- **that the Department continue to pursue the implementation of CANLAC and P.R.I.D.E. and carefully assess the resources that will be required;**
- **that responsibility for managing the Yukon foster care resources be centralized within the Department;**
- **that the Department actively encourage, resource and support the revitalization of the Yukon Foster Family Association, and that a formal relationship be established with the Yukon Foster Family Association such that they are fully engaged in decisions that impact their service objectives, working conditions and remuneration;**
- **that a foster care strategy be developed to construct a range of foster family-based service models to meet the range of needs of children for family-based care.**

Special Needs Children and Youth: There is a commendable commitment and investment in children with special needs who come to the attention of the Department. These children are often challenging to serve effectively as the complexity and uniqueness of their needs precludes their fitting readily into existing programs. As such, it is often necessary to develop services and resources for each individually. The manner in which the Department has developed services for children with special needs shows both creativity and dedication. They have shown the willingness, flexibility and capacity to develop creative, albeit necessarily costly solutions. For this the Department should be celebrated.

There are few straight-forward answers for many of these children with special needs. The ability to develop individualized solutions must be protected and

encouraged and clearly entrenched in policy. The case management tasks necessary to meet the needs of these children are time and resource intensive. Dedicated staff and networks of experts to support these children and their families are essential.

A problem for many jurisdictions like the Yukon is access to timely expert consultation in response to the pressing needs of these children. It is suggested that establishing a tele-medicine consultation network with specialized services across the country would prove invaluable.

Voluntary Agreements and Special Needs: One of the challenges of child welfare services serving families of children with special needs is the limitation that is often found in legislation that requires birth families to relinquish their parental authority to receive long-term care for their special needs children. It is important for the Yukon to find a solution that allows for long-term voluntary agreements to be signed which minimize administrative encumbrances and allows families to retain their parental rights.

FAS/FAE and Special Needs: A recurring theme throughout the file review, stakeholder interviews and case consultations was the impact of alcohol on the lives of the children. Of particular importance was the incidence of diagnosed or suspected Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Effect. It was noted that the Department has made effort to ensure the child welfare staff have access to regular training and consultation to support their work with children who suffer from or are at risk of FAS/FAE.

RECOMMENDATION 7: It is recommended that:

- **the Department's willingness to find flexible, individualized solutions for caring for children with special needs be supported in policy;**

- **the Department determine ways and means to provide families with children with special needs with the ability to sign long term voluntary agreements and maintain their parental rights;**
- **a tele-medicine consultation network be developed with specialized services across the country.**

Youth in Care:

Extended Care: Youth in care are unable to receive child welfare support at age 19. The provision in the Children's Act terminating services to youth at age 19 is inconsistent with many other jurisdictions which support youth in care to their twenty-first birthday. Policy makers and legislators often disregard the impact of such a restriction, not understanding the importance of the continuous relationship the young person has with the workers with whom they have worked. The legislative limitation is a barrier to the young person having a sense of connection to a caring set of adults who are willing to support them beyond care. It also limits youth seeking post secondary studies, or youth needing extra help and support to stay on track. It can also undermine continuity in long-term foster placements. Youth across jurisdictions consistently report that "it is not the same" when the financial services and supports are transferred child welfare to general welfare or similar financial support programs. The link with the parent agency and its historical connection is important to their sense of connectedness and continuance in relationships, which research shows clearly impacts on the future life chances of youth.

> "Allow me to live my dream"
> (foster child)

Rights and Responsibilities: None of the youth in care with whom the Review Team spoke were aware of their rights and responsibilities as persons in the care of the Department. It is important that this information be readily and tangibly available to the young people in care.

Youth in Care Network: Several youth spoke of feeling isolated and "different" from other young people who have not experienced being in care. They spoke of the desire to have the opportunity to meet with other youth in care in a neutral environment where they can candidly share their thoughts and interests. Such a program has been established in many Canadian jurisdictions as Youth In Care Groups. Many of these are linked to the National Youth in Care Network. It would be helpful for the Department to support the young people in care to develop a Yukon Youth in Care Network. Best results will be achieved if the Department supports youth in care to "do it for themselves." This can be facilitated by such things as providing a mentor, space to meet, a bit of funding for pizza and soda at the meetings, and resources to establish and sustain a communication network.

RECOMMENDATION 8: It is recommended that:

- **support through child welfare services be available to youth in care to the age of 21;**
- **a reader-friendly Rights and Responsibilities booklet be developed for children and youth in care. This would be a good project in which a Youth in Care Group could participate;**
- **the Department invest in supporting the development of a Youth in Care Network in the Yukon.**

Private Operators: The Yukon has used private operators to provide residential services for children in care for several years. Private operators form a key component of the Yukon spectrum of in-care resources.

While some private operators provide good service, there is a vulnerability in accountability and quality control against which reasonable safeguards can be taken. The programs must be required to meet reasonable standards of care if the needs and interests of the children are to be protected. As such, there must be clear operating criteria and accountability mechanisms which show pre-

determined program elements in terms of services and resources being purchased, measurable objectives, a process for gauging compliance, and evidence that the agreed-upon services are delivered and the expected outcomes are achieved.

The Department has instituted a formal contracting process and has developed residential standards which require monthly and annual reviews to monitor the services provided by the private operators. In addition, a licensing process which includes service delivery and program requirements is advisable.

RECOMMENDATION 9: It is recommended that the current accountability mechanisms for private operators be supplemented with a licensing process that addresses program elements and service delivery expectations.

Cross Sector Partnerships: The literature suggests that promising outcomes occur when child welfare engages service partners in an inter-related network of interdependent services, or, system. The collaborating system creates strengthened supports to children and their families, stimulates community solutions to their challenges, and increases the number and range of perspectives and experiences that can work in partnership with them to meet their needs.

> "There needs to be exceptional coordination/collaboration with other support agencies, such as counsellors, FASSY, Transition Home, Yukon Family Services Association, YTG Mental Health, YTG Victim Services, Family Violence Prevention Unit, CATS, NNADAP workers, etc."
> (parent of special needs child in care)

As Swift (2001) argues, "The isolation of the [child welfare] field as 'special' and separate from its social context creates an extremely narrow version of social reality, one that distorts, covers over, and delegitimizes other realities. . .The intractable problems of clients and workers engaged in this field of struggle recede to the background. Poverty, bad housing, malnourishment, insecure

childcare arrangements, poor job possibilities, woman abuse, addictions, health and mental health problems are the everyday concerns of child welfare workers."

There are good examples of joint planning for children and youth in Whitehorse and in the regions notwithstanding the frequently reported perception that the Branch is inflexible and resists collaboration. Current cooperative efforts such as those with Education and some First Nations are limited and would be expedited if they were part of a broader community initiative towards a Collaborative Children's Services Plan for Whitehorse and for each Region.

If the child welfare services of the Department are to embark on a process of leading the development of Collaborative Strategies for Children and Youth in the Yukon, there are fundamental shifts to consider in how one thinks if one is to operate from a collaborative viewpoint. It requires:

- cohesive, collaborative leadership that is public, and moves away from organizational self-interest;
- "participative openness" or inclusiveness;
- "reflective openness", or the willingness to be candidly introspective.
- meaningful engagement of the people who have the skills, knowledge and experience necessary for effective planning and delivery of services;
- recognition of the importance of life stages in the planning and delivery of services.

A collaborative system which supports a strategy for children and youth in the Yukon would be most effective if it were to be:

- child centred, and respects the importance of engaging the child, family, friends and community members as partners in the service planning and delivery. Child centred practice in child welfare has often been mistakenly interpreted to mean increased scrutiny over parenting. Other policy

alternatives that are also child centred are, as Swift (2001) points out, guaranteeing adequate resources for low income families, ensuring adequate health care and housing, creating safe and accessible child care programs. Collaborative approaches to services draw in cross sector partners that can promote thinking of child centred strategies in new ways;

- dependent on flexible funding being available for services to be designed to meet the child's individual needs;
- willing to share information to ensure services are planned and delivered on the basis of the best available information, while respecting reasonable needs for confidentiality;
- self-evaluative to ensure a reflective learning process which contributes to increased system competency;
- inclusive, inviting participation from key stakeholders in the planning and delivery of services to provide rich and diverse viewpoints;
- collaborative, drawing service partnerships into a service in which all members share a stake in the outcome.

Such community initiatives are demonstrated to have created opportunity to share resources, integrate planning and develop more effective services. Including the business sector as partners significantly enriches the process.

The development of a collaborative system is limited, however, by the willingness and capacity of the individuals and organizations to undertake the shifts in thinking that are necessary. Perhaps the greatest barrier is the difficulty in shifting organizational self-interest to meaningful consumer and community interest. The leadership who are working to establish a collaborative service network must be aware of the limiting factor of organizational self-interest and work to engage all partners into a shared vision.

RECOMMENDATION 10: It is recommended that the Department initiate a process which draws all stakeholders in services for children and youth to

a common table to develop community strategies for children and youth in the Yukon within a collaborative framework.

3.0 INFRASTRUCTURAL SUPPORTS

Structural Issues: The three work teams, Regional Services, Family Services and Child Placement Services currently work in relative isolation from one another. The structural isolation of the Regional Services in particular, and the functional separation of Family Services and Child Placement Services inhibits the full utilization of the expertise and resources that each brings to the Yukon child welfare system. The separation of Regional Services from the direct management of the Branch, however, is particularly concerning.

Child welfare in the Yukon is two-tiered, Whitehorse and 'everywhere else.' By Regional child welfare services falling under an administration separate from the Director of Family and Children's Services they risk having less access to the resources and expertise that is generated at the Branch because of its concentration on the child welfare mandate. This diminished access to centralized resources and expertise in turn decreases their ability to construct an equitable level of service to the Regions consistent with the quality of services in Whitehorse, and the responsibility of the Director of Family and Children's Services is fragmented.

The opportunities for the Branch staff and those working in the regions to benefit from each other's experience is limited by the operational separation of the work units. It is recommended, therefore, that Regional child welfare services be integrated with those of the Branch. Becoming part of the Branch also increases the opportunities to exchange skills and knowledge with the Whitehorse staff.

Good Regional work relies on flexibility and an intimate knowledge of the community and the partnerships that are developed therein. However, the factors which contribute to good Regional community work, such as affiliation with the community and the strong relationships that are established which create trust also create certain risks. There is the risk of becoming entrenched within the community and finding oneself allied against the Department, or becoming

enmeshed in local politics such that child welfare decisions may be skewed by competing interests. There is also the heightened risk to self, both physically, and emotionally when particular difficult and unpopular child protection decisions need to be made. It takes both insight, and talent as well as strong support from the supervisor to navigate the work, further reason to increase supervisory support as recommended above..

RECOMMENDATION 11: It is recommended that the Regional child welfare services be integrated within the Family and Children's Services Branch.

Recruitment and Retention of Staff: The retention of staff, and recruitment of new staff, is an ongoing struggle in the Yukon. Many staff expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by their workload, and unable to sustain their energy and commitment in the face of carrying extra work while awaiting vacancies to be filled. Staff and managers alike were frustrated by the protracted process of hiring which caused extended periods of understaffing, a factor contributing to the discouragingly high workloads.

> "The initial social worker on this file was new to the job: there should be a process to have a more experienced worker in situations as these and/or pairing an experienced worker with new social worker (mentorship)."
> (parent of child in care with complex needs)

A first step is to address workload. A broader strategy requires a reworking of the recruitment and hiring procedures with Human Resources and the Public Services Commission to underline the importance of expediting the recruitment and hiring process in child welfare, a need to look into strategies that support increased staff retention.

The literature suggests that the most effective retention and recruitment strategies are not single discrete activities. The best results come from developing a strong organization through good leadership coupled with effective management practices that create:

- an inclusive organization that is respectful of its staff and welcomes their participation in the life of the organization;
- a supportive organization that validates its workers and is at ease with the reasonable exercise of one's professional autonomy;
- a commitment to fair compensation that reflects the workload and responsibility endemic to child welfare;
- a management culture that ensures a reasonable workload, and anticipates stressors in the workplace and provides pro-active support;
- an organizational culture that recognizes the importance of professional and career development by providing career options and both in-service and external education and training opportunities;
- an organization that recognizes the importance of balancing work and personal life, and thus offers flexibility in the workplace;
- an organization with strong link to colleges and universities;
- effective Public Education strategies to develop a positive public image.

The development of supports such as:

- ongoing professional development;
- manageable workloads;
- accessible consultation and supervisory support;
- decreased administrative tasks;
- counselling assistance to deal with stress;
- flexible work hours to allow respite as well as the meeting of family obligations;
- meaningful involvement in the organization's planning and development;
- regular respectful feedback on performance;
- the opportunity to engage in community activities beyond direct service as a recognized part of the workload;
- a workplace that is sensitive and responsive to cultural variations and appreciates diversity, and understands that a non-mainstream worker may expect a management style different from prevailing ones;

are demonstrated to be effective in retaining staff. Providing the opportunity to "escape" for respite when needed, having ready access to transportation, and ensuring comfortable housing and working conditions are also important.

An effective recruitment and retention initiative, particularly in remote environments, requires one to assess the "goodness of fit " between the individual and the job required. This includes recognition of the person's personal learning interests, career aspirations, skill or knowledge strengths and limitations as well as the limitations of the system, which can form the basis of an individual professional development plan.

It also requires looking to those things which the North has uniquely to offer such as the quality of life, and focusing recruitment efforts in jurisdictions where potential recruits are compatible with Northern living. Recruitment strategies are most promising which consider employment opportunities for spouses and partners, educational resources for children and youth, and provide thorough orientation not only to the work but also to the communities within which they will live.

Characteristics of staff who are likely to succeed in Northern and remote environments as reported in the literature are individuals who are flexible, adapt well, have the capacity to be comfortable alone, are able to make social connections, show initiative, are self-starters, autonomous, risk-takers, self-confident, self-directed, and culturally aware.

RECOMMENDATION 12: It is recommended that the Department's Human Resources and the Public Services Commission priorize child welfare services and develop and resource, in conjunction with the Branch and Regional Services, (a) a comprehensive recruitment strategy to expedite filling vacancies within the child welfare services, (b) a

comprehensive retention strategy which addresses the loss of experienced child welfare staff.

Legislation: Although the Children's Act is dated, it is reasonably workable. However, there are shortcomings that should be considered when the legislation is amended. The following are a sample:

- The legislation should require mandatory reporting of child abuse;
- There is the need for a provision to extend child welfare supports and services for young people in care to age twenty-one;
- The provision for the court to speak to access issues should be clarified;
- There should be clear legislative direction regarding services with First Nations.

Statistics/Data: Little meaningful planning can be undertaken without data that identifies the service elements and client numbers reflective of the child welfare services. Shortcomings in the current information system seriously hampers the Department in its understanding of the child welfare needs of the Territory, responding to areas of need, and being able to effectively deploy resources. Consistent tracking of such things as caseload with any degree of confidence was severely limited notwithstanding the best efforts of the staff.

The problem is that effective information systems are not in place. It is absolutely essential to develop an information system, supported by the proper technology and technical services, if there is to be credible accomplishment in the Department's child welfare services planning.

The Information System must be designed to serve the stated interests of the frontline worker. The Information System must inform, frame, and define practice in a meaningful way so that it becomes a tool for the worker. It must not have the net impact of making their work more complex or more difficult. As such, it must be well field tested to ensure relevance to the frontline workers, or it will suffer

the fate of so many in jurisdictions where the input was so unreliable that there was little validity in the output.

RECOMMENDATION 13: It is recommended that the Department canvas its colleagues in other jurisdictions to look at information systems that are being developed, with the objective of building on what is available.

4.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE

There is a very real challenge in developing quality assurance mechanisms which do not burden the organization with esoteric administrative requirements perceived by staff and foster families as unrelated to the mission of their work, yet provide meaningful information which contributes to a better understanding of the outputs and outcomes of the services provided.

There is much in the literature that speaks to the increased bureaucratization of the child welfare organization, and a shift in its mission from outcomes for children to measuring outputs of the organization. Callahan(1993) argues that the move to corporate management ". . . is founded on the beliefs of scientific management, which emphasizes definable outputs, clear lines of responsibility, and efficient use of resources." However, she also states that it results in the reformulation of the mission of child welfare practice, from one that defines outcomes for clients, improving childcare, and family functioning to one that defines outcomes for the organization, providing efficient and effective service within a legal mandate and organizational resources. There is the risk of the output objective taking precedence over the outcome objective, or service impact.

There is also a potential unintended consequence for direct service. Callahan(1993) argues that "Increasing amounts of professional time spent asking preformed questions and acting on this information in pre-established ways mean reduced scope for development of worker-client alliances and for delivery of supports and resources based on expressed need." She adds that, "Although possible benefits of corporate management to the problems of child welfare are easily identified, experience suggests that it promises more than it can deliver. . . The feeling and caring aspects of the job, the real invisible work that often spells the difference between success and failure, have not been

identified in standards of practice. . .and are further discredited by these systems."

Within this context, it is important to construct a multidimensional approach to quality assurance that is respectful of direct practice and the values and mission of the organization, and can produce useful and accurate information which measures the quality of the services delivered.

As Harriet Ward (2000) points out, it is also important to maintain a link between individual and aggregate data so that information about outcome can be used to help both field social workers and managers identify how services can be made more effective.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The following approach is recommended as a Quality Assurance strategy:

1. **Council on Accreditation (COA): The COA provides a comprehensive accreditation of child welfare services across North America. It's standards and guidelines have been developed with and are supported by child welfare experts. While there is considerable work to reach the full accreditation level, the process, which is typically spaced over time, is an invaluable guide to constructing the processes and infrastructures that form the foundation of good practice. It is recommended that the Department engage the COA to support a process toward future accreditation.**

2. **Multi-rater Program Assessment: The input of stakeholders into the assessment and development of any service is a sine qua non. It is recommended that a two-part process be undertaken by the Department every two years which involves; (a) a questionnaire to be distributed to stakeholders, including families and children, which**

invites comments on the quality and nature of the child welfare services, and (b) a selection of focus groups provide direct input on key topical areas.

3. **Case File Review: A limited file review should be undertaken annually by the Department which selects a sample of (a) children in permanent care, and (b) child protection cases using standardized case review formats which measure compliance against standards, and assesses case practice. The Case File Review format from the Ontario Crown Ward Review Unit provides a template which can be adapted for use in the Yukon.**

   The annual case file review of the Department be supplemented by an external comprehensive file audit undertaken by the Child Welfare League of Canada on a bi-annual basis, and provides a report to the Director of Family and Children's Services of the Yukon.

4. **Foster Family Satisfaction: A Foster Family Satisfaction Inventory should be distributed to all fostering families annually through the Yukon Foster Family Association that addresses service quality.**

5. **Looking After Children: The "Looking After Children" program should continue to be supported and implemented, and the data provided used at the case level for direct service planning, and at the aggregate level for service system planning.**

6. **Complaints and Incidents Review: A review of all complaints and critical incidents should be completed annually by the Department and reported to the Director of Family and Children's Services.**

7. **Exit Interviews: All staff who are leaving the Department should have a formal exit interview by Human Resources in which they are asked about their experience within the Department, and provide recommendations to the Department.**

   All foster families who are leaving the Department should have a formal joint exit interview with the Yukon Foster Family Association and Department Foster Care Co-ordinator in which they are asked about their experiences with the Department and Association, and provide recommendations.

Advocacy: It is important for a child welfare system to have a function which safeguards children's interests from sole reliance on a service structure. A formal advocacy mechanism that is at arms length and representative of the community can serve to assure consumers of services that they have access to a process outside the direct service system which will respond to their interests.

Some jurisdictions have advocacy structures embedded in legislation. Others are supported in policy. It is important that the Yukon structure an advocacy system that would work best for the Yukon.

One model that was suggested is as follows:

- An Advocate Council be constructed that would advise the Minister of Health and Social Services on matters related to child welfare services and the Children's Act;
- The Advocate Council would consist of three representatives with background or familiarity with child welfare services in the Yukon from mainstream and aboriginal communities who are independent of the child welfare system;
- The Advocate Council members would be provided an honorarium to participate, and would have administrative support provided;

- The Council would meet as required to hear complaints and have the authority to investigate, to have access to case information when provided with appropriate releases, and to require service providers to attend as necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 15: It is recommended that an Advocate Council be established which reports to the Minister of Health and Social Services.

SUMMARY: While there are shortcomings in the Yukon child welfare system which, if addressed, will strengthen the Yukon's services for its children in care, the goodwill, skill and experience of the people who deliver the child welfare services and their First Nation and mainstream partners provide an encouraging atmosphere of optimism.

> It is good to have an end to journey toward;
> but it is the journey that matters, in the end.
>
> Ursula K. LeGuin

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

> "It's not enough for a scientist, community, or society to simply think up an idea to solve an environmental problem; the idea must also be put into practice -. . .before he ingenuity can be said to be fully supplied. I soon discovered that many of the critical obstacles occur not when the ingenuity is generated (there is usually no shortage of good ideas) but when people try to implement new ideas. The biggest obstacle is often political competition among powerful groups, which stalls or prevents key institutional reform."
>
> (Thomas Homer-Dixon, The Ingenuity Gap)

RECOMMENDATION 1: Given the serious consequences of understaffing at the frontline, it is recommended that Department review the current level of supervisor and social worker positions compared to the CWLC/CWLA benchmarks, and address staffing shortfalls.

RECOMMENDATION 2: It is recommended that an additional staff be hired to assume responsibility for child welfare policy development, support for implementation, and review.

RECOMMENDATION 3: It is recommended that:

- **the functioning and mandate of the Placement Review Team be reviewed by the staff and supervisors to ensure it best supports their needs in relation to the children being admitted to care;**
- **a decision-making framework be developed which provides for each potential admission to care being scrutinized in terms of possible alternative uses of the in-care funding that the child's potential placement would consume, with a view to using savings from in-care funding to support the child in her or his home or community if that is a viable and preferred option.**

RECOMMENDATION 4: It is recommended that the forms and administrative and legislatively driven procedures and documentation be rationalized and simplified through a process involving frontline staff.

RECOMMENDATION 5: It is recommended that:

- **particular attention be given to strengthening the ability of the social work staff to develop comprehensive social assessments in conjunction with their service partners;**
- **workers and supervisors scrutinize their use of psychological assessments to ensure that they provide a value-added to the development and delivery of a substantive Plan of Care.**

RECOMMENDATION 6: It is recommended that the Department, in collaboration with the Foster Families Association, ensure:

- **that the Department continue to pursue the implementation of CANLAC and P.R.I.D.E. and carefully assess the resources that will be required;**
- **that responsibility for managing the Yukon foster care resources be centralized within the Department;**
- **that the Department actively encourage, resource and support the revitalization of the Yukon Foster Family Association, and that a formal relationship be established with the Yukon Foster Family Association such that they are fully engaged in decisions that impact their service objectives, working conditions and remuneration;**
- **that a foster care strategy be developed to construct a range of foster family-based service models to meet the range of needs of children for family-based care.**

RECOMMENDATION 7: It is recommended that:

- **the Department's willingness to find flexible, individualized solutions for caring for children with special needs be supported in policy;**
- **the Department determine ways and means to provide families with children with special needs with the ability to sign long term voluntary agreements and maintain their parental rights;**
- **a tele-medicine consultation network be developed with specialized services across the country.**

RECOMMENDATION 8: It is recommended that:

- **support through child welfare services be available to youth in care to the age of 21;**
- **a reader-friendly Rights and Responsibilities booklet be developed for children and youth in care. This would be a good project in which a Youth in Care Group could participate;**
- **the Department invest in supporting the development of a Youth in Care Network in the Yukon.**

RECOMMENDATION 9: It is recommended that the current accountability mechanisms for private operators be supplemented with a licensing process that addresses program elements and service delivery expectations.

RECOMMENDATION 10: It is recommended that the Department initiate a process which draws all stakeholders in services for children and youth to a common table to develop community strategies for children and youth in the Yukon within a collaborative framework.

RECOMMENDATION 11: It is recommended that the Regional child welfare services be integrated within the Family and Children's Services Branch.

RECOMMENDATION 12: It is recommended that the Department's Human Resources and the Public Services Commission priorize child welfare services and develop and resource, in conjunction with the Branch and Regional Services, (a) a comprehensive recruitment strategy to expedite filling vacancies within the child welfare services, (b) a comprehensive retention strategy which addresses the loss of experienced child welfare staff.

RECOMMENDATION 13: It is recommended that the Department canvas its colleagues in other jurisdictions to look at information systems that are being developed, with the objective of building on what is available.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The following approach is recommended as a Quality Assurance strategy:

1. **Council on Accreditation (COA): The COA provides a comprehensive accreditation of child welfare services across North America. It's standards and guidelines have been developed with and are supported by child welfare experts. While there is considerable work to reach the full accreditation level, the process, which is typically spaced over time, is an invaluable guide to constructing the processes and infrastructures that form the foundation of good practice. It is recommended that the Department engage the COA to support a process toward future accreditation.**

2. **Multi-rater Program Assessment: The input of stakeholders into the assessment and development of any service is a sine qua non. It is recommended that a two-part process be undertaken by the Department every two years which involves; (a) a questionnaire to be distributed to stakeholders, including families and children, which invites comments on the quality and nature of the child welfare services, and (b) a selection of focus groups provide direct input on key topical areas.**

3. **Case File Review: A limited file review should be undertaken annually by the Department which selects a sample of (a) children in permanent care, and (b) child protection cases using standardized case review formats which measure compliance against standards, and assesses case practice. The Case File Review format from the**

Ontario Crown Ward Review Unit provides a template which can be adapted for use in the Yukon.

The annual case file review of the Department be supplemented by an external comprehensive file audit undertaken by the Child Welfare League of Canada on a bi-annual basis, and provides a report to the Director of Family and Children's Services of the Yukon.

4. **Foster Family Satisfaction: A Foster Family Satisfaction Inventory should be distributed to all fostering families annually through the Yukon Foster Family Association that addresses service quality.**

5. **Looking After Children: The "Looking After Children" program should continue to be supported and implemented, and the data provided used at the case level for direct service planning, and at the aggregate level for service system planning.**

6. **Complaints and Incidents Review: A review of all complaints and critical incidents should be completed annually by the Department and reported to the Director of Family and Children's Services.**

7. **Exit Interviews: All staff who are leaving the Department should have a formal exit interview by Human Resources in which they are asked about their experience within the Department, and provide recommendations to the Department.**

   All foster families who are leaving the Department should have a formal exit interview with the Yukon Foster Family Association and Department Foster Care Coordinator in which they are asked about their experience within the Department and Association, and provide recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 15: It is recommended that an Advocate Council be established which reports to the Minister of Health and Social Services.

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